

Message Text

SECRET

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NODIS

ALSO PASS WHITE HOUSE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM LEWIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV IS EG US
SUBJ: BEGIN'S MOOD--AN INCIPIENT CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

1. ALTHOUGH I HAVE JUST RECEIVED THE VERY WELCOME NEWS THAT THE CABINET DECIDED THIS MORNING TO ACCEPT OUR FORMULATION OF THE LANGUAGE FOR POINT B OF THE AGENDA, WITH THE VERY MINOR ADDITION ONLY OF THE WORDS "ISSUES OF THE" BEFORE "WEST BANK AND GAZA", WE SHOULD NOT BE MISLED BY THIS FAVORABLE OUTCOME AND ASSUME THAT ALL IS ROSY HERE. MY CONVERSATION WITH BEGIN IN THE WEE HOURS OF THE MORNING JANUARY 15 WAS REVEALING IN THE EXTREME. AND RABBI SCHINDLER HAS TOLD ME ABOUT HIS CONVERSATION WITH BEGIN AT 0830 THIS MORNING, AT WHICH HE WAS APPARENTLY EVEN MORE EMOTIONAL AND EMBATTLED IN MOOD THAN HE HAD BEEN A FEW HOURS EARLIER. THAT MOOD WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO SOME EXTENT THROUGH THE NEXT FEW DAYS AND WILL CAST SOMETHING OF A SHADOW OVER THE WORK OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE, ASSUMING IT NOW CAN BE

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CONVENED.

2. BEGIN'S MOOD IS COMPOUNDED REALLY OF TWO ELEMENTS: RESENTMENT AND INCREASING ANGER AT SADAT FOR HIS PERSONAL ATTACKS ON BEGIN IN THE LAST TWO OR THREE DAYS, MIXED WITH A SENSE OF BAFFLEMENT THAT SADAT STILL DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEGIN'S OFFER TO RESTORE

ALL OF SINAI TO EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE FACE OF RISING AND VEHEMENT OPPOSITION FROM BOTH THE OPPOSITION HERE AND KEY MEMBERS OF HIS OWN PARTY. BEGIN ALWAYS ASSUMED THAT THIS WAS A NEGOTIATING PROCESS WHICH WAS JUST BEGINNING, AND THAT SADAT WOULD SEE HIS SWEEPING OFFER ON SINAI AS TO A DEGREE COMMENSURATE WITH SADAT'S EPOCHAL DECISION TO COME TO JERUSALEM. WEIZMAN HAS UNDOUBTEDLY DESCRIBED TO BEGIN IN DETAIL HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH SADAT, AND THE AMIABLE ATMOSPHERE OF THOSE CONVERSATIONS, COMBINED WITH THE FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE AT ISMAILIA, SEEM TO HAVE LED BEGIN TO BELIEVE THAT SADAT WAS AGREEING WITH HIM A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN WAS THE CASE.

3. THE OTHER VERY TROUBLING ELEMENT IS A DEEP SENSE OF REBUFF AND ALMOST "BETRAYAL" BY HIS GOOD FRIEND PRESIDENT CARTER. OUR WEARYING EXCHANGES OVER THE PAST WEEK ABOUT THE RECORD OF CARTER'S MEETINGS WITH DAYAN AND BEGIN ARE SYMPTOMATIC OF THIS MOOD. THEY ARE NOT MERELY EXERCISES IN LEGAL HAIR-SPLITTING, AS ONE MIGHT THINK. BEGIN GENUINELY, I BELIEVE, THOUGHT THAT THE PRESIDENT APPROVED OF HIS SINAI PROPOSALS AND WOULD SUPPORT THEM IF NECESSARY, SINCE HE HAD CHARACTERIZED THEM AS "VERY REASONABLE." WHEN THE SETTLEMENTS ISSUE ERUPTED, AND WE SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT WITH HIM ABOUT OUR CONTINUING VIEW OF THE
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NATURE OF SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, IT CAME AT THIS DELICATE MOMENT AS A BUCKET OF ICE COLD WATER FROM THE WHITE HOUSE. THE PROBLEM HERE IS ONE OF PERCEPTIVE NOT OF HARD FACT. BEGIN CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE PRESIDENT WOULD NOW CHARACTERIZE SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI AS "ILLEGAL," AFTER HAVING SAID THAT HIS PROPOSAL TO RETAIN THEM UNDER THE PROTECTION OF SOME ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES WAS "VERY REASONABLE." ILLOGICAL--YES. BUT PSYCHOLOGICALLY A VERY POWERFUL FACTOR AT THE MOMENT.

4. THE STORIES NOW BEGINNING TO SURFACE HERE FROM ROY ATHERTON'S BACKGROUNDER ABOUT SECRETARY VANCE'S INTENTION TO PUT FORWARD A US PROPOSAL ON THE WEST BANK AND GAZA PROBLEM ONLY FEED FURTHER BEGIN'S SENSE OF BEING EMBATTLED, UNDERCUT, AND PRESSURED UNFAIRLY.

5. I DONT WANT TO BE OVERLY DRAMATIC. BUT I AM CERTAIN THAT WHEN HE WAS AWAKENED OUT OF A DEEP SLEEP EARLY THIS MORNING I WAS HEARING HIS TRUE REACTIONS WITHOUT CALCULATION. AND THEY SIGNIFY A DEEPLY

TROUBLED PRIME MINISTER, WHO BELIEVES HE HAS GONE VERY FAR AND VERY FAST AT THE EXPENSE OF THE APPROBATION OF HIS OLDEST FRIENDS AND TO SOME EXTENT HIS OLDEST CONVINCTIONS. HE FEELS THAT NEITHER SADAT NOR CARTER UNDERSTAND NOR CREDIT HIM FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE, AND ARE TAKING UNFAIR ADVANTAGE OF HIM AT THIS MOMENT.

6. WE KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT BEGIN'S CHARACTERISTIC PERSONALITY TRAITS TO HAVE REASON TO FEAR THAT HIS REACTION TO THESE PERCEPTIONS WILL BE TO BECOME MORE COMBATIVE RATHER THAN LESS. I HOPE THAT COOLER HEADS WILL PREVAIL. IN THIS SITUATION, I BELIEVE VERY STRONGLY THAT SECRETARY VANCE'S PERSONALITY AND FRIENDSHIP FOR BEGIN CAN BE A MAJOR FACTOR IN STEADYING THE SITUATION. THEREFORE
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I THINK IT IS DOUBLY IMPORTANT THAT THE SECRETARY RESCHEDULE HIS TRIP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. LEWIS

NOTE BY OC/T: TEL AVIV 677 NOT PASSED.

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NNN

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